

Wellness Notes

High Blood Cholesterol*

(Part IV)

● Treatment - Why Lower Your LDL?

The main goal of cholesterol-lowering treatment is to lower your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) or bad cholesterol level enough to reduce your chances of having a heart attack or developing a disease caused by narrowing of the arteries. There are two main ways to lower your cholesterol -- through Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) or with medicines.

Studies have shown that lowering LDL (bad) cholesterol can prevent heart attacks and reduce deaths from heart disease in both men and women. It can slow, stop, or even reverse the buildup of plaque. It can also lower the cholesterol content in some plaques. This makes the plaques more stable and less likely to burst and cause a heart attack.

Lowering LDL cholesterol is especially important for people who already have heart disease or have had a heart attack -- it will reduce the chances of having another heart attack and can actually prolong life. You and your doctor will decide on your goal LDL level. Your goal LDL cholesterol level depends on your level of risk for developing heart disease or for having a heart attack at the time you start treatment. The higher your risk, the lower your goal LDL should be. Major risk factors that affect your LDL goal include:

- cigarette smoking
- high blood pressure (140/90 mmHg or higher), or being on blood pressure medicine
- low HDL cholesterol less than 40 mg/dL
- family history of early heart disease (heart disease in father or brother before age 55; heart disease in mother or sister before age 65)
- age (men 45 years or older; women 55 years or older).

Based on your LDL-lowering goal and your LDL level, you and your doctor will develop a plan for treating your high blood cholesterol. When you are under treatment, your doctor will check you regularly to make sure your cholesterol level is controlled and see if you have developed any side effects. While under treatment, you should continue to take any other medicines that your doctor has prescribed for other health problems -- for example, high blood pressure or diabetes. It is important that you take ALL medicines as your doctor prescribes. The combination of medicines may lower your risk for heart disease or heart attack.

Also, get help with quitting smoking and losing weight if they are risk factors for you. Once your LDL goal has been reached, your doctor may prescribe treatment for high triglycerides and/or a low HDL level, if you have them. The treatment includes losing weight if needed, increasing physical activity, quitting smoking, and possibly taking medicines.